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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 003297

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL (FARR); EUR/WE (VAN CLEVE);  
EAP/CM

FROM EMBASSY VATICAN/MESSAGE NO. 94/01

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/11

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KIRF PINR VT CH PGOV PHUM KIRF PINR VT CH TW PREL TW  
SUBJECT: THE VATICAN AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN

CHINA: INPUT FOR PRESIDENTIAL BACKGROUND PAPER.

(U) CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. JOSEPH MERANTE. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) THE VATICAN'S OVERRIDING CONCERN IN  
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MAINLAND CHINA IS ITS RIGHT TO MINISTER TO THE ESTIMATED 10 MILLION CATHOLIC POPULATION. THE VATICAN AND THE PRC DO NOT HAVE OFFICIAL RELATIONS. THE PRC REPUDIATES VATICAN CLAIMS TO LEAD CHINESE CATHOLICS AND INTERPRETS VATICAN ECCLESIASTIC ACTIONS AS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN SOVEREIGN AFFAIRS. THE PRC OVERSEES THE OFFICIAL "CATHOLIC PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION," SET UP IN 1951 TO HARMONIZE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE WITH STATE AUTHORITIES. AN UNDERGROUND CATHOLIC COMMUNITY REMAINS LOYAL TO VATICAN LEADERSHIP.

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TAIWAN, THE VATICAN, AND THE PRC  
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¶2. (C) THE VATICAN MAINTAINS OFFICIAL STATE-TO-STATE RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN (THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA), HAVING TRANSFERRED ITS EMBASSY (KNOWN AS A "NUNCIATURE") FROM BEIJING TO TAIPEI IN THE WAKE OF THE REVOLUTION. TAIWAN IN TURN MAINTAINS AN EMBASSY TO THE VATICAN, PROVIDING THE ISLAND NATION WITH A PRECIOUS EUROPEAN PLATFORM FROM WHICH TO PURSUE A VIGOROUS DIPLOMATIC AGENDA.  
THE VATICAN CONTINUES TO SIGNAL ITS READINESS TO DOWNGRADE ITS TAIPEI MISSION AND ESTABLISH OFFICIAL RELATIONS WITH THE PRC. THE VATICAN AFFIRMS THAT THE MOTHBALLING OF ITS ORIGINAL BEIJING NUNCIATURE WAS NEVER DEFINITIVE, ADDING THAT IT HAS CONSISTENTLY PRACTICED A ONE-CHINA-POLICY. THE VATICAN HAS A LOW-KEY PRESENCE IN CONFIDENTIAL

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HONG KONG, AN OFFICE THAT IS A VESTIGE OF THE HAND-OVER; IT CLAIMS TO BE POISED TO REOPEN IN BEIJING QUOTE OVERNIGHT ENDQUOTE, A CLAIM THAT IS LARGELY RHETORICAL. TAIWAN'S REPRESENTATIVES TO THE VATICAN ARE SANGUINE AT THIS PROSPECT OF A DIPLOMATIC SEA CHANGE, YET THE TAIWAN EMBASSY IS QUIETLY EXPLORING OTHER WAYS TO PRESERVE A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN ROME, FOR INSTANCE, THROUGH ACCREDITATION TO THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA, LOCATED IN ROME AND FORMALLY RECOGNIZED BY 85 GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING ITALY.

¶3. (C) VATICAN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PRC REMAIN UNOFFICIAL, IRREGULAR, AND OFTEN VITUPERATIVE.  
THE STICKING POINT IS PRC UNWILLINGNESS TO ACKNOWLEDGE VATICAN JURISDICTION OVER THE CHINESE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, INCLUDING VATICAN OVERSIGHT OF THE TRAINING OF CLERGY AND THE APPOINTMENT OF NEW BISHOPS. THE PRC TREATS VATICAN CLAIMS TO ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY IN CHINA AS TANTAMOUNT TO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL SOVEREIGN AFFAIRS. WHILE THE PRC PERMITS OCCASIONAL CHURCH VISITS BY VATICAN ENVOYS, INCLUDING AT THE CARDINAL LEVEL, AND ALLOWS LIMITED TRAINING ABROAD FOR "PATRIOTIC" SEMINARIANS, THE RUMORS OF AN EMERGING DIPLOMATIC RAPPROCHEMENT HAVE BEEN GREATLY OVERSTATED, WITH THE VATICAN-PRC RELATIONSHIP INCREASINGLY STRAINED. IN JANUARY 2000 THE PRC CROSSED A RUBICON OF SORTS WHEN THE STATE-SPONSORED "CATHOLIC PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION" ORDAINED FIVE BISHOPS IN DEFIANCE OF A VATICAN CONFIDENTIAL

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BAN. CONVERSELY, THE MASS BEATIFICATION OF 120 CHINESE MARTYRS AT THE VATICAN ON OCTOBER 1, 2000, A PRC NATIONAL HOLIDAY IN CELEBRATION OF THE REVOLUTION, WAS A PROVOCATION, WITH THE PRC

LAMBASTING THE MARTYRS AS CRIMINAL ELEMENTS AND IMPERIALIST BLACKGUARDS. THE PRC WAS DEAF TO VATICAN PROTESTS THAT THE CHOICE OF DATE WAS SHEER COINCIDENCE.

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THE CATHOLIC PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION AND THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH: A BLURRING LINE.  
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¶4. (C) IN 1951 THE PRC ESTABLISHED AN OFFICIAL "CATHOLIC PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION" TO MINISTER TO THE COUNTRY'S CATHOLIC POPULATION. RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF THE PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION IS TECHNICALLY ILLEGAL, YET HAS CONTINUED IN GATHERINGS OF THE SO-CALLED UNDERGROUND CHURCH. ACCORDING TO THE VATICAN, MEMBERS OF THIS UNDERGROUND CATHOLIC COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO RUN THE RISK OF DETENTION, PUNITIVE

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ACTION DRL-02

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 ACQ-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 DS-00  
EAP-00 EB-00 EUR-00 FAAE-00 FBIE-00 VC-00 TEDE-00  
INR-00 LAB-01 VCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 SS-00 USIE-00  
IIP-00 DSAC-00 SAS-00 /003W

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FINES, AND OTHER FORMS OF GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION. VATICAN MEDIA HAVE REPORTED THE RAMPANT DESTRUCTION OF PLACES OF WORSHIP LACKING OFFICIAL PERMITS. THE VATICAN HAS VOICED CONCERN THAT BOTH THE CATHOLIC PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION AND THE

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UNDERGROUND CHURCH FACE A SHORTAGE OF CLERGY AS WELL AS A LOOMING GENERATION GAP, WITH MOST PRIESTS TRAINED BEFORE 1955 OR AFTER 1985 ON ACCOUNT OF A PROLONGED INTERRUPTION OF OFFICIAL ORDINATIONS. MOREOVER, A NUMBER OF ELDERLY CLERGY REMAIN IN DETENTION, WITH THE VATICAN OBTINENTLY UNABLE TO DETERMINE THEIR WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS. THE VATICAN IS CAUTIOUS IN ITS COMMENTARY ON THE PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE PATRIOTIC AND UNDERGROUND CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IS BLURRING. ACCORDING TO VATICAN SOURCES AND FIELD REPORTING, A NUMBER OF CLERGY IN THE PATRIOTIC CHURCH ARE IN TRUTH LOYAL TO THE VATICAN. SIMILARLY, THE VATICAN WELCOMES VISITS BY PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION SEMINARIANS AS A CHANCE TO SHAPE, EVEN IF INDIRECTLY, THEIR THEOLOGICAL FORMATION.

MERANTE